

Employment for Veterans: Trends and Programs

Updated May 11, 2015

Congressional Research Service

<https://crsreports.congress.gov>

R42790

Summary

Veterans' employment outcomes in the civilian labor market are an issue of ongoing congressional interest. This report offers introductory data on veterans' performance in the civilian labor market as well as a discussion of veteran-targeted federal programs that provide employment-related benefits and services.

According to federal data, the unemployment rate for veterans who served after September 2001 is higher than the unemployment rate for nonveterans. Conversely, the unemployment rate for veterans from prior service periods (a much larger population than post-9/11 veterans) is lower than the nonveteran unemployment rate. The varied demographic factors of each of these populations likely contribute to variations in employment outcomes, though their degree of influence is unclear.

There are a number of federal programs to assist veterans in developing job skills and securing civilian employment. Broadly speaking, these programs can be divided into (1) general veterans' programs, (2) programs that target veterans with service-connected disabilities, and (3) competitive grant programs that offer supplemental services but may not be available to veterans in all areas.

General veterans' programs begin with transition programs that are provided to exiting members of the Armed Forces. These transition programs cover a variety of topics, including information on identifying occupations that align with military skills and specializations, conducting job searches, applying for employment, and navigating veterans' benefits. One of the most common veterans' benefits is educational funding through the GI Bill. The GI Bill programs typically provide funding for tuition, fees, books, housing, and other educational costs while the veteran is enrolled.

Veterans who are seeking employment without obtaining additional education receive priority of service at local federally funded American Job Center (AJC) locations and may receive assistance from dedicated state personnel. Veterans who wish to pursue employment in the federal government are assisted by several policies that give them preference in the competitive hiring process or, in some cases, allow them to forgo the competitive process and be appointed directly. Veterans who wish to start a small business may receive loans and technical assistance from the Small Business Administration (SBA).

Veterans with service-connected disabilities who have obstacles to employment may be assisted by the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) program. This program provides assistance in identifying an occupation that is consistent with the veteran's skills and interests and providing services (including educational services) to achieve that outcome. Disabled veterans and other veterans with substantial barriers to employment can receive assistance from the Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP), which funds personnel positions that provide assistance in local labor markets as part of the AJC network.

In addition to these nationwide programs, the federal government also funds competitive grant programs for state, local, and private entities to provide employment-oriented services to veterans. These include the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program, which provides employment services in conjunction with other supportive services.

Contents

Background	1
Employment Trends Among Veterans	1
Employment-Related Programs for Veterans	4
General Veterans' Employment and Training Programs	6
Transition Programs for Separating Members of the Armed Forces.....	7
Credentialing of Servicemembers and Transfer of Military Skills	9
GI Bill Educational Assistance Programs	10
Services Through the American Job Center Network.....	10
Online Veterans Employment Center.....	11
Federal Employment.....	12
Small Business Administration Programs.....	13
Programs for Veterans with Service-Connected Disabilities.....	14
Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E).....	15
Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) Employment Services.....	15
Components of General Programs That Target Disabled Veterans	16
Veteran-Targeted Competitive Grant Programs	16
Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP)	16
TRIO Veterans Upward Bound (VUB).....	16
Programs that are Currently Lapsed.....	17
Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) for Employers	17

Figures

Figure 1. Unemployment Rates by Veteran Status	4
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Tables

Table 1. Employment Outcomes by Veteran Status, 2014 Annual Average	2
Table 2. Employment-Related Programs, Benefits, and Services for Veterans	5

Contacts

Author Information.....	18
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Background

Veterans' employment outcomes in the civilian sector are an issue of ongoing congressional interest. A number of programs currently exist to assist veterans in obtaining or training for civilian employment. There is regular congressional debate about expanding or otherwise amending these programs to better serve veterans.

This report discusses veterans' employment trends and programs. The first section presents data on veterans' employment outcomes, recent trends, and issues to consider when interpreting veterans' employment data. The subsequent sections present brief discussions of existing programs that provide employment-related services to veterans. These services are divided into (1) general programs that are broadly available to veterans, (2) programs that target veterans with service-connected disabilities, and (3) competitive grant programs that provide additional employment-related services to veterans but may not be available to all veterans.

Notably, this report does not attempt to provide an exhaustive list of all programs that may assist veterans in the labor market, nor does it attempt to provide comprehensive information on the programs it discusses. Instead, it aims to provide a broad overview of the largest employment-related programs as well as other initiatives that may inform future policy. For detailed information on each program, readers are encouraged to refer to the CRS reports or other sources that are referenced in each section.¹

Employment Trends Among Veterans²

Estimates of veterans' employment and unemployment are published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS).³ The estimates are derived from the Current Population Survey (CPS), a monthly household survey in which respondents may self-identify as veterans. Veterans' employment outcomes are frequently compared to the employment outcomes of nonveterans to establish veterans' relative performance in the labor market.

This section will divide workers into three groups: (1) Gulf War Era II (GWII) veterans who served at any point after September 2001, (2) veterans from prior service periods, and (3) nonveterans.⁴ Since these populations vary in many characteristics other than veteran status, comparisons of employment outcomes between these groups should be conducted with caution.

Recent employment outcomes for veterans and nonveterans are presented in **Table 1**. As the table shows, the unemployment rate for GWII veterans is higher than the unemployment rates of both veterans from other service periods and nonveterans. GWII veterans, however, constitute less than one-quarter of the veteran labor force (about 2.5 million of just about 10.7 million).

¹ References also include a CRS analyst for congressional clients to contact about the topic. In cases where a topic does not list a contact, inquiries from congressional clients should be directed to the coordinator of this report.

² This section was prepared by Benjamin Collins, Analyst in Labor Policy.

³ The data discussed in this section are mostly 2014 annual averages. BLS publishes monthly employment estimates for veterans, though these monthly estimates lack the demographic detail of its annual estimates. The most recent monthly estimates of veterans' employment are always available at <http://www.bls.gov/web/empsit/cpseea40.htm>.

⁴ The designation of Gulf War Era II veterans follows the definition set by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Data for veterans from other periods were calculated by subtracting Gulf War Era II veterans data from total veterans data. Nonveterans data are limited to persons age 18 and over.

Table 1. Employment Outcomes by Veteran Status, 2014 Annual Average

	Population (thousands)	Labor Force (thousands)	Unemployed (thousands)	Unemployment Rate
All Veterans	21,229	10,744	573	5.3%
Gulf War Era II Veterans	3,185	2,535	182	7.2%
Other Veterans	18,044	8,209	391	4.8%
Nonveterans	217,820	143,207	8,618	6.0%

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employment Situation for Veterans—2014*, <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/vet.pdf>.

Notes: Gulf War Era II veterans are those who served any time after September 2001. Nonveterans exclude persons under age 18.

Several factors that are not observable in **Table 1** should also be considered when interpreting the employment data in the table.⁵

- *The GWII veteran labor force is younger than the nonveteran labor force.* About 55% of GWII veterans in the labor force are under the age of 35, compared to about 36% of nonveterans in the labor force. Since younger workers generally have higher unemployment rates than older workers, GWII veterans' relative youth may influence their unemployment rate.⁶
- *Veterans have a different educational distribution than nonveterans.* Among those in the labor force, 1% of GWII veterans and 3% of other veterans have less than a high school education, compared to 8% of nonveterans. Conversely, the proportions of college graduates among the labor forces of GWII veterans (33%) and other veterans (31%) are slightly lower than nonveterans (38%).⁷ The effect of this different educational distribution on veterans' employment outcomes is unclear.
- *Disability issues.* Approximately 16% of all veterans and 29% of GWII veterans reported service-connected disabilities.⁸ Among veterans of all service periods, there was little difference between veterans with service-connected disabilities and veterans without service-connected disabilities in their respective labor force participation rates (45% v. 50%) and unemployment rates (5.9% for each group). Among GWII veterans, veterans with service-connected disabilities were less likely to participate in the labor force (75% v. 87%), though GWII veterans with service-connected disabilities had a lower unemployment rate than veterans from

⁵ Data on veterans' characteristics are from BLS, "Employment Situation of Veterans—2013," March 20, 2014, <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/vet.htm>.

⁶ Ibid., Table 2A. In 2014, the unemployment rates for both GWII veterans under the age of 35 as well as nonveterans under the age 35 were each 8.7%.

⁷ Ibid., Table 3. Data only consider veterans age 25 and over. About 11% of the GWII veterans in the labor force are under the age of 25.

⁸ Ibid., Table 7. Approximately 19% of veterans did not report their disability status. These data are from a one-month supplement to the CPS with an August 2014 reference period. Since the one-month reference period is different from the one-year reference period of the other data, these data on veterans with service-connected disabilities are not directly comparable to the other employment data in this report.

the same era who did not report service-connected disabilities (5.9% v. 6.6%).⁹ Comparable data on employment outcomes for nonveterans with disabilities were not available.

- *Categorization of post-military transition period.* Recent veterans who have not yet secured post-service employment are categorized as unemployed and entitled to unemployment insurance.¹⁰ The classification of this transition period may influence GWII veterans' unemployment rate.

Figure 1 presents recent historical data on unemployment rates for GWII veterans, other veterans, and nonveterans.¹¹ Several trends emerge over the six-year reference period:

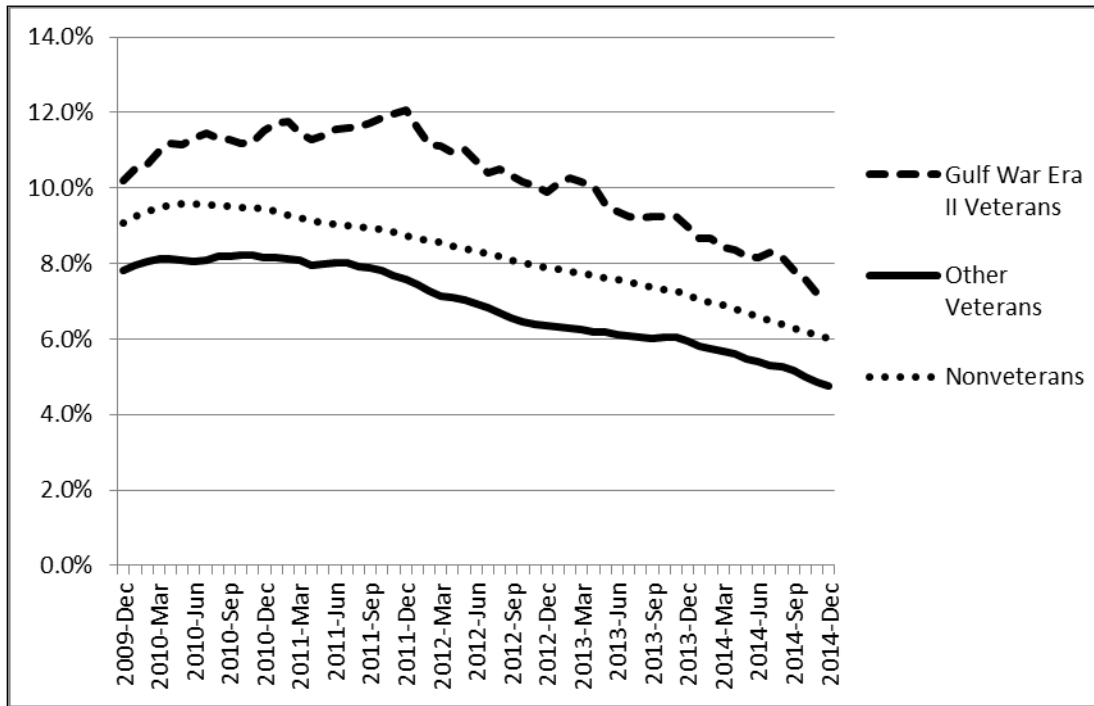
- *The unemployment rate for GWII veterans is typically above that of nonveterans, while the unemployment rate for other veterans is below that of nonveterans.* The average unemployment rate for the period in the graph was 9.8% among GWII veterans, 6.9% among veterans from other periods of service, and 8.0% among nonveterans. As noted previously, differences in the characteristics of each population may influence their respective unemployment rates.
- *The unemployment rate for GWII veterans is more dynamic than the unemployment rate for other populations.* While using a 12-month moving average somewhat controls for large variations in monthly estimates, changes in GWII veterans' unemployment rate is still more dynamic than the changes for other populations. This dynamism is likely due to small sample sizes of GWII veterans in the surveys rather than abrupt changes in this population's unemployment rate.
- *The unemployment rate for each group trends similarly over the reference period.* While the dynamic nature of the GWII veterans' unemployment rate somewhat masks this trend, each group's unemployment rate followed a generally upward trend early in the period covered by the graph and then declined during the later period. The similarity of these trends underscores the influence of the broader labor market on veterans' employment outcomes.

⁹ Ibid. Table 6.

¹⁰ For more information on unemployment insurance for former members of the armed services, see CRS Report RS22440, *Unemployment Compensation (Insurance) and Military Service*, by Julie M. Whittaker.

¹¹ The reference period was determined by the earliest availability of monthly data for GWII veterans.

Figure 1. Unemployment Rates by Veteran Status
12-month moving averages



Source: 12-month moving average calculated by CRS based on monthly data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Employment Situation historical data for Table A-5, generated at <http://www.bls.gov/webapps/legacy/cpsatab5.htm>.

Notes: Data are displayed as the final month of the 12-month moving average. For example, December 2009 is the 12-month period ending in December 2009. Gulf War Era II veterans are those who served any time after September 2001. Nonveterans exclude persons under age 18.

Employment-Related Programs for Veterans

This report highlights the primary employment and training services programs that are authorized to improve veterans' employment outcomes. It does not, however, attempt to present a comprehensive list of employment-related programs for veterans. This report emphasizes programs available to veterans of active duty and generally omits discussion of programs that target former members of the military reserve. It also omits discussions of programs or program components that provide benefits to eligible family members of veterans. The final section of this report describes the Work Opportunity Tax Credit, a credit that is currently lapsed but may be reauthorized.

The veteran-targeted programs in this report are presented in **Table 2**. Each is discussed in greater detail in the subsequent text. These programs are grouped into three categories:

- *Programs that are broadly available to veterans.* While they may have some eligibility limitations, these programs are generally available to veterans in all geographic locations, with or without service-connected disabilities;
- *Programs that target veterans with service-connected disabilities.* These programs include the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment program as well specialized versions of some generally available veterans programs; and

- *Competitive grant programs.* These programs fund employment-related services for veterans but may be limited in scope or geographic availability.

Table 2. Employment-Related Programs, Benefits, and Services for Veterans

Program	Description	FY2015 Funding
General Programs, Benefits, and Services for Veterans		
Transition Assistance Program (TAP) / Transition Goals Plans Success (Transition GPS)	TAP provides services to exiting servicemembers related to obtaining civilian employment and otherwise transitioning to civilian life. The Transition GPS curriculum is currently being implemented within TAP. Transition GPS is mandatory for nearly all exiting servicemembers with expanded services over a five-day curriculum.	\$14 million from the Department of Labor (DOL); FY2015 funding levels from the Department of Defense (DOD) and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) are not available. ^a
Educational Benefits (GI Bill)	GI Bill programs generally provide funds for educational costs as well as living expenses while enrolled in educational programs. The most-used program for recent veterans is the Post-9/11 GI Bill.	\$13.0 billion (estimated) ^b
Employment Services through the American Job Center (AJC) Network	Veterans receive priority of service for all DOL-administered programs, including employment services and subsidized training through the AJC network. AJC activities are supported by Local Veteran Employment Representatives (LVER) who focus on veterans' issues.	See note ^c
Priority of Service in DOL training programs	Veterans receive priority of service for any DOL-funded training or employment service program that they are eligible for as members of the general public.	not applicable
Federal Hiring Preferences and Special Hiring Authorities	Veterans receive preference when applying for nearly all competitively-hired federal employment. There are also special hiring authorities in which qualified veterans may be directly appointed to a position that would otherwise be competitively hired.	not applicable
Small Business Administration (SBA) Programs	SBA has a variety of programs to assist veterans with developing and managing a small business, financing a small business, and acquiring federal contracts.	\$3.0 million for Veterans' Business Outreach Centers and \$7.5 million for the "Boots to Business" training initiative; veterans are also eligible to participate in other SBA training and lending programs

Program	Description	FY2015 Funding
Programs for Veterans with Service-Connected Disabilities		
Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E)	VR&E provides funding for training, subsistence, and other expenses to support veterans with service-connected disabilities to pursue an employment outcome or independent living course.	\$1.2 billion (estimated) ^d
Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP)	DVOP funds state personnel positions that provide intensive employment services to disabled and other high-need veterans.	\$175 million (also funds LVER)
Specialized versions of other programs	TAP and federal hiring preference have specialized components that target veterans with service-connected disabilities.	Included in general program costs
Competitive Grant Programs that Provide Supplemental Services		
Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP)	HVRP provides competitive grants to organizations that provide employment assistance and other supportive services to homeless veterans.	\$38.1 million
Veterans Upward Bound (VUB)	VUB provides services such as tutoring and application assistance to aid veterans in preparing for a program of postsecondary education	See note ^e

Source: Sources are listed in each program's section of this report.

- a. In FY2014, DOD funding was \$124 million and VA funding was \$103 million.
- b. Program is an entitlement. FY2015 costs are estimated for Post-9/11 GI Bill and Montgomery GI Bill-Active Duty, excluding administrative expenses.
- c. Veterans receive priority of service in DOL-funded employment and training programs, but estimates of the portion of these programs' funds that are used to serve veterans are not available. The Jobs for Veterans State Grant program, which provides funding for DVOP and LVER personnel at AJCs, received an appropriation of \$175 million in FY2015.
- d. Program is an entitlement. FY2015 costs are estimates and include benefits and subsistence allowances; they do not include administrative and counseling expenses.
- e. FY2015 funding is not available. FY2014 funding was \$13.7 million.

General Veterans' Employment and Training Programs

The programs discussed in this section are available to most veterans of active duty. In the interest of simplicity, this report generally does not present detailed eligibility criteria for each program and benefit, though it does attempt to note eligibility requirements that categorically exclude large numbers of veterans (such as the eligibility window following discharge for GI Bill benefits). This report may omit requirements that would exclude relatively few veterans, such as most programs' exclusion of veterans who were dishonorably discharged.¹² The specific eligibility criteria for each program will usually be available in the external sources that are referenced in the report section that discusses the program.

¹² For a more detailed discussion of factors that may influence a former servicemember's eligibility for veterans' benefits, see CRS Report R42324, *Who is a "Veteran"?—Basic Eligibility for Veterans' Benefits*, by Umar Moulta-Ali.

Transition Programs for Separating Members of the Armed Forces¹³

In 1990, as the post–Cold War drawdown was beginning, Congress authorized a set of benefits and services to assist military personnel in the transition to civilian life.¹⁴ Some of these authorities continued in effect after the drawdown was complete and formed the basis of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP). TAP underwent substantial modification in 2012 and 2013, with the introduction of a revamped curriculum known as Transition GPS.¹⁵ TAP and the new Transition GPS curriculum are both described below.

Transition Assistance Program (TAP)

TAP provides pre-separation services and counseling on a number of transition-related topics to separating members of the Armed Forces.¹⁶ In addition to guidance on broader transition issues such as financial management and health care, TAP includes information on the following employment issues as they relate to veterans:

- the correlation between military skills and civilian occupations;
- professional certifications, including licensing and apprenticeships;
- public and community service opportunities, including federal employment opportunities and veterans' hiring preferences (described in a subsequent section of this report);
- self-employment and entrepreneurship, including veterans' small business and entrepreneurship programs; and
- education and training assistance, including use of veterans' educational benefits and other job training opportunities.

TAP services are provided at many military installations, often found in the military installation's career or family support offices. The Department of Defense (DOD), Department of Labor (DOL), Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) are each involved in conducting TAP.¹⁷ The curriculum for TAP underwent major revision in 2012. The redesigned curriculum is called Transition GPS, discussed below.

¹³ Inquiries from congressional clients related to transition programs should be directed to Valerie Bailey Grasso. This section was originally written by Lawrence Kapp.

¹⁴ Codified at 10 U.S.C. 1141-1150.

¹⁵ Department of Veterans Affairs, "Redesigned Transition Assistance Program Announced," July 23, 2012, available at <http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2360>.

¹⁶ Formerly, TAP also included a program called Disabled Transition Assistance Program (DTAP), which provided individual instruction for disabled servicemembers regarding their job-readiness and special needs they might have as a result of their disability, along with information on the VA's Vocational Rehabilitation and employment services. DTAP was incorporated into the VA benefits segment of the new Transition GPS curriculum in 2012.

¹⁷ Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Labor, Department of Defense, Department of Veterans Affairs, and Department of Homeland Security, "Transition Assistance Program and Disabled Transition Assistance Program," signed September 19, 2006, available at <http://www.dol.gov/vets/vpls/VPL%20Attachments/VPL%201-08%20Atch%201%20-%20Transition%20Assistance%20and%20Disabled%20Transition%20Assistance%20Programs%20Memorandum%20of%20Understanding%20dated%20September%202007..pdf>.

Transition GPS

Transition GPS is the name of the redesigned TAP curriculum brought about by the work of the executive branch's Veterans' Employment Initiative Task Force and intended to conform with the Veterans Opportunity to Work (VOW) to Hire Heroes Act of 2011.¹⁸ Among other changes, the VOW Act made participation in TAP mandatory for nearly all separating military personnel and required that all TAP participants receive "an individualized assessment of the various positions of civilian employment in the private sector for which such member may be qualified" as a result of their military training. These statutory changes took effect on November 21, 2012, one year after the enactment of the VOW Act.

DOD introduced the Transition GPS pilot program at seven military bases in the summer of 2012, and it is now conducted at major military installations across the country and overseas. It includes a five-day core program that incorporates the elements of TAP described above into a redesigned curriculum that is intended to ensure that servicemembers are "career ready" when they leave military service. The core curriculum includes the following modules: pre-separation counseling (4 hours), VA benefits¹⁹ (6 hours), employment workshop (24 hours), financial planning (4 hours), resilient transition (1 hour), and a crosswalk between military and civilian skills that includes a "skills gap" analysis (2 hours). Servicemembers are also required to develop an individual transition plan and participate in a "capstone event." The capstone event verifies that the servicemember meets career readiness standards and has a viable individual transition plan.²⁰

Some of the key differences between the "legacy" TAP curriculum and the new Transition GPS curriculum include the following:

- The five-day core curriculum is mandatory, not optional, for nearly all separating servicemembers.
- Class sizes are smaller than under the previous curriculum to provide individual attention.
- The required individual transition plan is standardized and tied to the servicemember's personal goals.
- Successful completion is based on achieving "career readiness standards," not simply attendance.
- The program concludes with a capstone event that verifies that each servicemember meets career readiness standards and has a viable individual transition plan.
- In addition to the core curriculum, servicemembers are able to participate in optional tracks for higher education, entrepreneurship, and technical training, each of which last two days. Servicemembers can participate in all three optional tracks if they so desire.

The "core" Transition GPS curriculum was implemented in November 2012. Implementation of the optional tracks began in 2013.

¹⁸ The VOW to Hire Heroes Act is Title II of P.L. 112-56. In addition to modifying TAP, the law had other provisions related to veterans' employment.

¹⁹ As part of the VA benefits briefing, each participant is required to set up a VA benefits account online.

²⁰ If servicemembers have not met the career readiness standards or created viable transition plans, the capstone event will ensure they are referred for appropriate training or remedial assistance.

Credentialing of Servicemembers and Transfer of Military Skills

There are ongoing efforts to align military training and experience with civilian credentials and licenses. These efforts can enable members of the Armed Forces to obtain civilian credentials while enlisted or apply military experience to civilian licensing requirements after discharge.

The armed forces have several initiatives to increase enlisted personnel's access to civilian credentials. Section 548 of P.L. 112-81, the FY2012 National Defense Authorization Act, (as amended by Section 543 of P.L. 112-239, FY2013 NDAA), required the Secretary of Defense:

[T]o carry out a pilot program to assess the feasibility and advisability of permitting enlisted members of the Armed Forces to obtain civilian credentialing or licensing for skills required for military occupational specialties (MOS) or qualification for duty specialty codes.²¹

DOD selected five civilian occupational areas for inclusion in the pilot program: aircraft mechanics, automotive mechanics, health care support, logistics and supply, and truck driving. These occupational specialties were selected, in part, because of the size of the labor forces in each group, as well as the projected outlook for both medium to high wages and a projected need. The interim and final reports on the Pilot program were issued in 2013.²²

The Armed Forces are building on the pilot program to develop credentialing opportunities for other military occupational specialties.²³ Credentials aligned with military service can include (1) non-DOD government licenses, such as a commercial drivers' license (CDL) issued by a state government or (2) certification from an independent, industry-recognized agency, such as the American Welding Society. Recently, the Army issued Army Directive 2015-12, which provides guidance on implementing a credentialing program and a Career Skills Program.²⁴

There have also been efforts to translate military training and skills to civilian credentials after a member separates from the Armed Forces. Most occupational licenses are issued at the state level. State programs that consider military training and experience in the context of licensing requirements are at various stages of development.²⁵ In the case of licenses that are issued by the federal government, the Veterans Skills to Jobs Act (P.L. 112-147) specifies that federal licensing authorities shall consider and may accept "any relevant training received by [a veteran] while serving as a member of the armed forces, for the purpose of satisfying the requirements for such license."

²¹ Section 558 of P.L. 112-81, the FY2012 NDAA, enacted into law on December 31, 2011.

²² U.S. Department of Defense, Pilot Program: *Civilian Credentialing for Military Occupational Specialties: A Report in Response to Section 558 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2012, P.L. 112-81 (as amended by Section 543 of the FY2013 NDAA, P.L. 112-239)*, Volumes 1 and 2, September 27, 2013.

²³ Michelle Tan, "Army to Create Certifications or Licenses for every MOS." *Army Times*, March 24, 2015. Accessed online at <http://www.armytimes.com/story/military/careers/army/enlisted/2015/03/23/army-credentialing-every-mos/25049105>.

²⁴ Secretary of the Army, Army Directive 2015-12, Implementation Guidance for Credentialing Program and Career Skills Program, Memorandum for Distribution, March 11, 2015, accessed online at http://www.apd.army.mil/pdffiles/ad2015_12.pdf.

²⁵ The National Governors Association documents state-level best practices as part of its Veterans' Licensing and Certification Policy Academy.

GI Bill Educational Assistance Programs²⁶

The VA administers several educational assistance programs for veterans (commonly known as GI Bills) that are intended to avert unemployment, adjust veterans to civilian life, reward military service, encourage recruitment and retention in the military, and make education affordable. VA educational assistance payments are available for approved programs of education as well as living expenses while enrolled.²⁷

While there are several GI Bill programs, the vast majority of veterans who utilize education benefits do so under the Post-9/11 GI Bill or the Montgomery GI Bill-Active Duty (MGIB-AD). Both programs provide benefits for 36 months of full-time schooling or the equivalent in part-time attendance.²⁸ The Post-9/11 GI Bill provides separate payments for tuition and fees, supplies, housing, and other costs. The maximum benefit for tuition and fees at a public institution of higher learning is equal to in-state tuition and fees for that program of education. As of August 1, 2014, the maximum benefit for tuition and fees at a private or foreign institution is \$20,235 per academic year. The monthly housing allowances under the Post-9/11 GI Bill varies by geographical location and range from about \$800 to about \$3,700.²⁹ MGIB-AD provides a single monthly payment to the veteran to cover both education and living expenses. As of October 1, 2014, the maximum benefit under MGIB-AD is \$1,717 per month.

Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits are typically available within 15 years of discharge or release from active duty. MGIB-AD benefits (and most other GI Bill benefits) are generally available within 10 years. Notably, GI Bill benefits are not considered when calculating a student's eligibility for need-based Pell Grants, meaning that a veteran who meets Pell Grant criteria may receive both Pell Grants and GI Bill benefits.³⁰ As an additional benefit, educational assistance received under a VA education program (including subsistence or housing allowances for enrolled veterans) is not subject to federal income tax.

In its FY2016 budget, the VA estimated that total FY2015 benefits for the Post-9/11 GI Bill and MGIB-AD would be \$13.0 billion.³¹

Services Through the American Job Center Network

Most federal employment programs are administered through a network of approximately 2,500 local American Job Centers (AJCs, also known as One-Stop Career Centers).³² Most AJC partner programs are administered at the federal level by the DOL. Federal law requires that veterans

²⁶ For more information on each of the GI Bills, see CRS Report R42785, *GI Bills Enacted Prior to 2008 and Related Veterans' Educational Assistance Programs: A Primer*, by Cassandra Dortch; and CRS Report R42755, *The Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 (Post-9/11 GI Bill): Primer and Issues*, by Cassandra Dortch.

²⁷ Eligible educational programs include but are not limited to college courses, vocational programs, entrepreneurship courses, apprenticeships, on-the-job training, and licensing or certification tests.

²⁸ Benefits can be used in nonconsecutive months. For example, a veteran may use GI Bill benefits for four traditional nine-month full-time academic years.

²⁹ Monthly housing allowances under the Post-9/11 GI Bill equal the monthly basic allowance for housing for a member of the Armed Forces with dependents in pay grade E-5 in the military housing area in which the veteran's educational institution is located. Local rates are available at <http://www.defensetravel.dod.mil/site/bah.cfm>.

³⁰ For more information on Pell Grants, see CRS Report R42446, *Federal Pell Grant Program of the Higher Education Act: How the Program Works and Recent Legislative Changes*, by Cassandra Dortch.

³¹ The FY2016 VA budget is available at <http://www.va.gov/budget/products.asp>.

³² For more information on the AJC network, see <http://jobcenter.usa.gov/>.

receive priority of service in all DOL programs for which they are qualified.³³ In practice, this means that veterans have ready access to most AJC-administered programs, including job search assistance, case management, and subsidized training.³⁴

In 2011, DOL further operationalized veterans' priority of service in the AJC system by launching a Gold Card initiative directed at post-9/11 veterans. In addition to priority in all training programs, the initiative also provides veterans with specific intensive employment services such as job readiness assessments, career guidance, and referral to training through federal or state programs. Qualified veterans may also receive six months of follow-up services from a case manager.³⁵

Jobs for Veterans State Grants

The Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG) program provides formula grants to states to fund two types of personnel positions that work in conjunction within the AJC system to assist veterans.

1. *Local Veterans Employment Representatives* (LVER) conduct outreach to employers on behalf of veterans and facilitate employment, training, and placement services through the state workforce system. LVER staff may provide referral to other benefits and services (such as the GI Bill) and may assist other AJC personnel in developing strategies to assist veterans.
2. *Disabled Veterans Outreach Program* (DVOP) personnel provide intensive employment services (such as case management) to veterans with barriers to employment. Disabled veterans receive the highest priority in services, though other veteran populations with significant barriers to employment (such as homelessness or a lack of high school diploma or equivalent) may also be served by DVOP personnel.

In FY2015, \$175 million was appropriated for JVSG activities.

Online Veterans Employment Center

In April 2014, President Obama announced the launch of a Veterans Employment Center on the VA website.³⁶ The site provides online tools that can assist veterans in searching for local jobs, building a resume, and identifying civilian jobs that correspond with their military skills and specialties. The site also provides referrals to many of the federal services and benefits described in this report.³⁷

³³ Priority of service means that that a veteran (or the qualified spouse of a veteran) "shall be given priority over nonveterans for the receipt of employment, training, and placement services provided under [a DOL-administered] program, notwithstanding any other provision of law." Priority of service was established by The Jobs for Veterans Act of 2002 (P.L. 107-288) and is codified at 38 U.S.C. 4215.

³⁴ For a discussion of AJC-administered programs, see CRS Report R43301, *Programs Available to Unemployed Workers through the American Job Center Network*.

³⁵ More information on the Gold Card initiative is available at <http://www.dol.gov/vets/goldcard.html>.

³⁶ "Obama Administration Launches Online Veterans Employment Center: One-Stop-Shop Connects Veterans, Transitioning Service Members, and their Spouses to Employers," April 23, 2014, at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/04/23/obama-administration-launches-online-veterans-employment-center-one-stop>.

³⁷ The website is hosted by the VA at <https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits/jobs>.

Federal Employment³⁸

There are several programs and policies that provide a preference for veterans in obtaining employment in the federal government. These policies and programs can either give veterans an advantage in the competitive hiring process or, in some cases, allow a veteran to be appointed without going through the competitive process.

Preference in Competitive Hiring

In the federal hiring process for competitive positions, veterans may receive preference in the assessment of their applications. The specifics of the preference depends on the process through which the application is assessed and the specifics of the veteran applicant's service.

In instances where applications are assessed a numerical score based on the applicant's qualifications, veterans may receive points in addition to their assessed score. A five point-preference is available to veterans who served during a war or in specified campaigns.³⁹ A 10-point preference is available to veterans who either (1) have a service-connected disability or (2) received a Purple Heart. The 10-point preference is available to these veterans regardless of their period or location of service. Typically, the maximum numerical score of an application is 100 points, though veterans' preference can raise a veteran applicant's score over 100.

In other instances, the application assessment process may forgo the points system and instead evaluate applicants using a *category rating* system in which applicants are assigned to categories based on their qualifications (e.g., not qualified, qualified, or highly qualified). In these instances, veterans' preference is operationalized by listing preference-eligible veterans ahead of all non-preference-eligible in the same qualification category.⁴⁰ In this process, veterans with service-connected disabilities are listed ahead of veterans without service-connected disabilities.

Special Hiring Authorities

There are several hiring programs that allow qualified veterans to be appointed to what would otherwise be competitive federal positions without having to compete with the general public. Typically, these programs allow an agency to hire a veteran in a shorter period of time than it would take to fill the position through the competitive service process. To be eligible for these special hiring authorities, a veteran must have been separated from the Armed Forces for less than three years, have served in a qualified combat mission, or be disabled.⁴¹

Other Initiatives

In 2009, President Barack Obama issued Executive Order 13518, which aimed to "enhance recruitment of and promote employment opportunities for veterans within the executive branch."⁴² The program established a Council on Veterans Employment that included 24 agencies

³⁸ For a more in-depth discussion of federal employment for veterans, see archived CRS Report RS22666, *Veterans Benefits: Federal Employment Assistance*, by Christine Scott.

³⁹ Applicable dates and criteria are available from the Office of Personnel Management at <http://www.opm.gov/staffingportal/vetguide.asp#2When>.

⁴⁰ For some jobs, a veteran with service-connected disability who is assessed lower qualification category may "float" to the top of the highest qualification category.

⁴¹ Full details on these hiring authorities is available from the Office of Personnel Management at <http://www.opm.gov/staffingportal/vetguide.asp#6>.

⁴² The full text of the order, including a list of participating agencies, is available at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR->

and required each agency to develop an agency-specific plan and designate an office or officer for promoting employment opportunities for veterans within the agency. The order also established a website that offered veteran-specific information on obtaining federal employment as well as contact information for the individual or office in each agency responsible for promoting veterans' employment within the agency.⁴³

Small Business Administration Programs⁴⁴

The Small Business Administration (SBA) has a variety of programs to assist veterans with developing and managing a small business, financing a small business, and acquiring federal contracts. Congressional interest in these programs has increased in recent years primarily due to reports by veteran organizations that veterans were experiencing difficulty accessing the SBA's programs, as well as general interest in facilitating the transition of veterans from military to civilian life.

In an effort to assist veteran entrepreneurs, the SBA has either provided or supported management and technical assistance training for veteran-owned small businesses since its formation as an agency.⁴⁵ In FY2014, the SBA provided management and technical assistance training services to more than 100,000 veterans through its various management and technical assistance training partners (e.g., Small Business Development Centers, Women's Business Centers, SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives), and Veterans Business Outreach Centers (VBOCs)).⁴⁶ In addition, the SBA's Office of Veterans Business Development administers several programs to assist veteran-owned businesses, including the Boots to Business program, which is an elective track within the Department of Defense's Transition Goals, Plans, Success (Transition GPS) program.⁴⁷

Also, in an effort to enhance small business owners' access to capital, since October 1, 2013, the SBA has waived the up-front, one-time loan guaranty fee on all SBA 7(a) loans of \$150,000 or less (benefitting both veteran and non-veteran small business owners).⁴⁸ Since January 1, 2014, the SBA has also waived the upfront, one-time loan guaranty fee for all veteran loans under the SBAExpress program (called the Veterans Advantage Program).⁴⁹ The Obama Administration

2009-11-13/pdf/E9-27441.pdf.

⁴³ See <http://www.fedshirevets.gov/AgencyDirectory/index.aspx> for a list of agency contacts.

⁴⁴ This section was prepared by Robert Jay Dilger, Senior Specialist in American National Government, and Sean Lowry, Analyst in Public Finance. For a more detailed discussion, see CRS Report R42695, *SBA Veterans Assistance Programs: An Analysis of Contemporary Issues*, by Robert Jay Dilger and Sean Lowry.

⁴⁵ U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Banking and Currency, *Extension of the Small Business Act of 1953*, report to accompany S. 2127, 84th Cong., 1st sess., July 22, 1955, S.Rept. 84-1350 (Washington: GPO, 1955), p. 17.

⁴⁶ U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), "FY2016 Congressional Budget Justification and FY2014 Annual Performance Report," pp. 97-101, at <https://www.sba.gov/sites/default/files/1-FY%202016%20CBJ%20FY%202014%20APR.PDF>.

⁴⁷ SBA, "Operation Boots to Business: From Service to Startup," at <https://www.sba.gov/offices/headquarters/ovbd/resources/160511>; and SBA, "Operation Boots to Business: Fact Sheet," at https://www.sba.gov/sites/default/files/files/B2B_Fact%20Sheet.pdf.

⁴⁸ SBA, "SBA Sets Fees on New Loans Under \$150,000 to Zero, Getting Loans Into the Hands of More Entrepreneurs," October 30, 2013, at <https://www.sba.gov/blogs/sba-sets-fees-new-loans-under-150000-zero-getting-loans-hands-more-entrepreneurs>.

⁴⁹ SBA, "SBA Announces New Measures to Help Get Small Business Loans Into the Hands of Veterans," November 8, 2013, at <https://www.sba.gov/content/sba-announces-new-measures-help-get-small-business-loans-hands-veterans>; and U.S. Small Business Administration, "Procedural Notice: SBA Veterans Advantage," December 18, 2013, at https://www.sba.gov/sites/default/files/lender_notices/5000-1299_0.pdf.

announced that the SBAExpress veteran fee waiver is part “of SBA’s broader efforts to make sure that veterans have the tools they need to start and grow a business.”⁵⁰

The SBAExpress program is designed to increase the availability of credit to small businesses by permitting lenders to use their existing documentation and procedures in return for receiving a reduced SBA guaranty on loans.⁵¹ It provides a 50% loan guaranty on loan amounts up to \$350,000, which is less than the guaranty of up to 85% of loans of \$150,000 or less and up to 75% of loans of \$150,001 to the statutory limit of \$5 million provided by the SBA’s main 7(a) loan guaranty program.

Since October 1, 2014, the SBA has also provided veterans a 50% discount of the upfront, one-time loan guaranty fee for all non-SBAExpress 7(a) loans above \$150,000. The Obama Administration has indicated that it plans to extend all three of these fee waivers through FY2016.⁵²

The SBA also assists veterans through its Military Reservist Economic Injury Disaster Loan Program (MREIDL), which supplements its general, direct-loan disaster lending program. MREIDL provides disaster assistance in the form of direct loans of up to \$2 million to help small business owners who are not able to obtain credit elsewhere to meet ordinary and necessary operating expenses that they could have met but are not able to meet because an essential employee has been called up to active duty in his or her role as a military reservist or member of the National Guard due to a period of military conflict.⁵³

The SBA also assists small businesses, including service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses, in acquiring federal contracts through its management and oversight of the federal government’s procurement goals for small businesses.⁵⁴ Under the goaling program, at least 3% of the total value of all small-business-eligible prime contract awards and subcontract awards are supposed to be awarded to small businesses owned and controlled by service-disabled-veteran-owned small businesses.⁵⁵

Programs for Veterans with Service-Connected Disabilities

Additional employment services exist for veterans with service-connected disabilities. The Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) program provides comprehensive services for veterans with a service-connected disability and does not have an analogue among general

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ SBA, “The SBA Express Pilot Program: Inspection Report,” June 1998, p. 3.

⁵² SBA, “FY2016 Congressional Budget Justification and FY2014 Annual Performance Report,” pp. 10, 38, 39, 93, at <https://www.sba.gov/sites/default/files/1-FY%202016%20CBJ%20FY%202014%20APR.PDF>. Legislation was introduced during the 113th Congress (S. 2143, the Veterans Entrepreneurship Act) to make the veteran SBAExpress fee waiver permanent. P.L. 113-235, the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2015, provided statutory authorization for the veteran SBAExpress fee waiver for FY2015.

⁵³ SBA, “Disaster Assistance Program: SOP 50-30-7,” May 13, 2011, p. 48, at <https://www.sba.gov/sites/default/files/sops/SOP%2050%2030%207.pdf>; and 13 C.F.R. §123.508. For further information and analysis concerning the SBA’s disaster assistance loan program, see CRS Report R41309, *The SBA Disaster Loan Program: Overview and Possible Issues for Congress*, by Bruce R. Lindsay.

⁵⁴ See CRS Report RL33243, *Small Business Administration: A Primer on Programs and Funding*, by Robert Jay Dilger and Sean Lowry.

⁵⁵ See P.L. 100-656, the Business Opportunity Development Reform Act of 1988 and P.L. 105-135, the HUBZone Act of 1997—Title VI of the Small Business Reauthorization Act of 1997 (small businesses generally); and P.L. 106-50, the Veterans Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development Act of 1999 (service-disabled-veteran-owned).

veterans' programs. Other programs for disabled veterans are specialized variations of general programs that were discussed previously.

Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E)⁵⁶

VR&E provides job training and employment services to veterans who have service-connected disabilities.⁵⁷ To be entitled to VR&E services, a veteran with a service-connected disability must also demonstrate an employment handicap that hinders the veteran's ability to prepare for, obtain, or retain employment consistent with his or her abilities, aptitudes, and interests.

VR&E offers several tracks of services, depending on the veteran's employment objective and needs. Veterans who already have the necessary job skills or seek to return to previous employment can receive short-term services such as resume assistance and job accommodations. Veterans who need job skills are eligible for education and training benefits as well as employment services once they complete training. The VA has reported that long-term services, including education and training, is the most-utilized VR&E track.

In FY2015, mandatory VR&E benefits are estimated to be approximately \$1.2 billion. FY2015 discretionary expenditures in support of the VR&E program (primarily counseling and support services) are estimated to be \$313 million.⁵⁸

Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) Employment Services⁵⁹

DVOP provides formula grants to states to hire staff to provide a range of intensive services to veterans with service-connected disabilities as well as other veterans with multiple barriers to employment.⁶⁰ Services include case management, referral to other service providers (e.g., the VA's VR&E program discussed in the prior subsection), employment counseling, and job search assistance.

DVOP is part of DOL's JVSG program, which also funds the previously discussed LVER program.⁶¹ In FY2015, JVSG's budget authority was approximately \$175 million. JVSG is funded out of the Employment Security Administration Account in the Unemployment Trust Fund.

⁵⁶ For more information on the VR&E program, see CRS Report RL34627, *Veterans' Benefits: The Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program*, by Benjamin Collins.

⁵⁷ VR&E also provides independent living services to veterans who are not able to work. In FY2013, approximately 20% of completed rehabilitations under VR&E were independent living (i.e., not employment-based) rehabilitations.

⁵⁸ FY2015 estimates are on page VBA-84 and VBA-251 of Volume III of the FY2016 VA budget, available at <http://www.va.gov/budget/docs/summary/Fy2016-VolumeIII-BenefitsBurialProgramsAndDepartmentalAdministration.pdf>.

⁵⁹ This section was prepared by David H. Bradley, Specialist in Labor Economics.

⁶⁰ While non-disabled veterans with barriers to employment may receive direct services from DVOP personnel, statute specifies that veterans with service-connected disabilities receive the highest priority of service. See 38 U.S.C. 4103A.

⁶¹ JVSG is described in greater detail in the "Jobs for Veterans State Grants" section of this report. More information on veteran-related initiatives administered the U.S. Department of Labor, including the JVSG program, is available at <http://www.dol.gov/vets/>.

Components of General Programs That Target Disabled Veterans

Several of the broader veterans' programs described previously in this report have specialized components for disabled veterans. Additional detail can be found in the sources referenced in each program's primary section of this report.

- *Transition Assistance Program.* TAP and the Transition GPS curriculum provide specialized services for exiting servicemembers with service-connected disabilities.
- *Federal Employment.* As discussed in the section above, veterans with service-connected disabilities are eligible for the highest preference in competitively hired federal positions. Disabled veterans are also eligible for special hiring authorities, including noncompetitive appointments for qualified veterans with a disability rating of 30% or more from the VA.⁶²
- *Work Opportunity Tax Credit* (currently lapsed; see WOTC section for full details). Some WOTCs were available for businesses that hired veterans who were eligible for disability compensation from the VA. The largest available tax credits were for hiring a veteran who was eligible for disability compensation and who was unemployed for at least six of the 12 months prior to hire.

Veteran-Targeted Competitive Grant Programs

Additional programs provide competitive grants for entities that provide services to veterans. Since the programs are competitive grants, they may be available only in certain areas, may have limited capacity, or may serve only a targeted veteran population.

Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP)⁶³

HVRP is a competitive grant program administered by DOL. The HVRP program has two goals: (1) assisting veterans in achieving meaningful employment, and (2) assisting in the development of a service delivery system to address the problems facing homeless veterans.

HVRP grantee organizations provide services that include outreach, assistance in drafting a resume and preparing for interviews, job search assistance, subsidized trial employment, job training, and follow-up assistance after placement. Recipients of HVRP grants also provide supportive services not directly related to employment such as transportation, provision of assistance in finding housing, and referral for mental health treatment or substance abuse counseling.

FY2015 appropriations for HVRP were \$38.1 million.

TRIO Veterans Upward Bound (VUB)⁶⁴

The TRIO Veterans Upward Bound (VUB) program provides services to assist veterans in preparing for programs of postsecondary education. VUB projects provide academic instruction, tutoring, assistance in completing secondary school, assistance with college admissions and

⁶² For more information on the "30% or More Disabled Veterans" hiring authority, see <http://www.opm.gov/staffingportal/vetguide.asp#30%Disabled>.

⁶³ For more information on the HVRP, see CRS Report RL34024, *Veterans and Homelessness*, by Libby Perl.

⁶⁴ For more information on TRIO programs, including Upward Bound, see CRS Report R42724, *The TRIO Programs: A Primer*, by Cassandra Dortch.

applications, and assistance applying for financial assistance. It is administered by the Department of Education (ED).

To be eligible for participation, veterans must be in need of academic support to pursue education beyond secondary school successfully. At least two-thirds of program participants must be low-income, potential first-generation college students. The remaining one-third of participants must be either low-income, potential first-generation college students, or otherwise be at risk of academic failure. The program defines a veteran who is at risk for academic failure as an individual who has been out of high school or dropped out of a program of postsecondary education for five or more years, has scored on standardized tests below the level that demonstrates a likelihood of success in a program of postsecondary education, or meets the definition of an individual with a disability.

Final data on the portion of FY2015 TRIO funding that was allocated to VUB projects are not available. In FY2014, ED allocated \$13.7 million of the \$838 million in TRIO appropriation to VUB projects.⁶⁵

Programs that are Currently Lapsed

Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) for Employers⁶⁶

The WOTC provided a tax credit for employers who hired qualified veterans. In cases where the eligible hire worked at least 400 hours, the credit was equal to 40% of the wages paid to the eligible veteran, up to a certain level.⁶⁷

Authorization for WOTC expired after December 31, 2014. In the past, WOTC has expired and then been retroactively reauthorized with other tax provisions (“tax extenders”).⁶⁸

DOL issued guidance on January 7, 2015, noting that state agencies may continue to accept new WOTC applications, but that they must postpone final processing of the applications.⁶⁹ These applications may be processed if Congress enacts the WOTC for 2015.

Under the most recent authorization (which expired after December 31, 2014), the criteria and credit amounts for veterans were:

- a maximum credit of \$2,400 for hiring a veteran who was receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP; formerly food stamps) benefits for at least three months during the year prior to hire;

⁶⁵ U.S. Department of Education, Veterans Upward Bound Program, Funding Status, <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/triovub/funding.html>, as downloaded on January 5, 2014.

⁶⁶ For more information on the WOTC, see CRS Report R43729, *The Work Opportunity Tax Credit*, by Benjamin Collins and Sarah A. Donovan. This report also describes nonveteran target populations that are eligible for the WOTC (e.g., at-risk youth or individuals convicted of a felony).

⁶⁷ The size of the WOTC was based on wages paid the employee during the first year of employment. In cases where an eligible hire worked between 120 and 400 hours, the tax credit was reduced to 25% of wages paid. If the eligible hire worked fewer than 120 hours, the employer was not eligible for the credit.

⁶⁸ For example, authorization for the WOTC lapsed after December 31, 2013, but was retroactively authorized for 2014 by the Tax Increase Prevention Act of 2014 (P.L. 113-295), which was enacted in December 2014. For more information on Tax Extenders for 2014, see CRS Report R43898, *Tax Provisions that Expired in 2014 (“Tax Extenders”)*, by Molly F. Sherlock

⁶⁹ See “WOTC Program Guidance,” http://www.doleta.gov/business/incentives/opptax/pdf/InterimInstructions_2014Reauthorization_2015Hiatus.pdf.

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- a maximum credit of \$2,400 for hiring a veteran who had been unemployed for a total of at least four weeks but less than six months in the year prior to hire;
- a maximum credit of \$4,800 for hiring a veteran who was eligible for disability compensation from the VA and was within one year of discharge or release from military duty;
- a maximum credit of \$5,600 for hiring a veteran who had been unemployed for a total of at least six months in the year prior to hire; and
- a maximum credit of \$9,600 for hiring a veteran who was eligible for disability compensation from the VA and who had been unemployed for a total of six months in the year prior to hire.

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